

## MICHIGAN PARTNERS WITH THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION TO JOIN THE *FAMILY TO FAMILY* NETWORK

In November 2000, the Family Independence Agency received an initial grant of \$150,000 from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, with additional resources of approximately \$1,000,000 to be made available over the next three years. These funds are targeted to *Family to Family* planning, implementation and state rollout.

### Background of the *Family to Family* Model

*Family to Family* is a child welfare system reform initiative with a goal to place those children who are removed from their families, and only those who *must* be removed, with one permanent and stable family *in the child's own community*, until reunification with birth families can occur, or until the child is released for adoption. A priority of the program is to reduce the number of children placed in congregate or institutional care.

What is unique to this initiative is that *Family to Family* focuses on building collaboration and community partnerships, an approach that Michigan human service agencies and their partners have also found successful in recent years. Children and families are best served when the child welfare system uses and builds on the strengths of the community.

There has been a recognition for a number of years that the foster care system too often must place children far from their homes, and that these children usually move multiple times. There is substantial research indicating that children who have more frequent contact with their birth parents, remain in their schools, and continue their existing friendship and family networks, have a higher rate of successful reunification.

The *Family to Family* model has four key strategies:

1. *Community partnership.* *Family to Family* builds on natural helping networks, neighborhood partners, and the belief that there are strengths and resources in every community from which children enter the child welfare system.
2. *Neighborhood-based recruitment, retention, training and support of foster parents.* The number of foster parents recruited to be part of the *Family to Family* network has increased significantly. Retention of foster families has also improved as a result of the training and support systems developed. Birth parents are more able to maintain a relationship and keep a visitation schedule when their children are placed in their own neighborhood or community. Children are less traumatized by removal from their families if they are not also removed from their schools, neighborhoods and other supports that are familiar to them.
3. *Self-evaluation.* *Family to Family* sites use data to drive the decisions about their systems, learn where children come from, where they are placed, and whether outcomes improve as a result of the initiative.

4. *Team decision-making.* Both birth and foster parents are regularly consulted as an integral part of the team decision making process that will impact their birth/foster child. Encouraging regular contact between birth and foster parents leads to more successful reunification for many children and their families.

### **Michigan's Implementation of *Family to Family***

Two counties, Wayne and Macomb, have been selected as the first demonstration sites for ***Family to Family*** in Michigan. In Macomb the initiative is targeted to South Warren, and in Wayne to Southeastern Village, which is a geographic area on the east side of Detroit. Both targeted areas have had significant numbers of families involved with the child welfare system and a high number of removals to out of home care.

Each county has hired a ***Family to Family*** coordinator and has begun work on the critical issues necessary for successful implementation, including:

- establishing effective community partnerships to support ***Family to Family***;
- increasing the number of foster families in the targeted areas;
- providing those families with key supports such as foster parent support groups; and
- training of case workers on the elements of team decision making.

A statewide steering committee, chaired by the FIA directors of Child and Family Services, Outstate Operations and Wayne County, has been formed to ensure the success and sustainability of the initiative as it is expanded statewide over the next several years. The steering committee members will meet quarterly and share their collective experience and common sense to serve as a reality check. They will be primary advocates on the importance of making our foster care system more child-centered, neighborhood-based and family-focused. Both Macomb and Wayne counties have local steering committees that are responsible for coordination issues with the targeted areas and for overseeing the committee progress.

For more information on the principles, strategies and specific tools for implementation of ***Family to Family***, please check the Annie E. Casey Foundation web site at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)

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